

Cholera morbus<sup>+</sup>  
An 120 Chorea  
Colic  
Inaugural Dissertation on Constipation

Chorea sancti viti or saint viter's Dance

For

The degree of Doctor of Medicine,

In

The University of Pennsylvania

By



Caleb Baker Wallace of Lexington Kentucky

1809

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1800

An essay.

The connection of the name of (saint vitus) with the disease which I am about to describe, appears to have originated like many other names of the like nature, among writers, during the period of fanaticism, and superstition, in the seventh ~~th~~<sup>th</sup> Century.

We are informed that a superstitious belief prevailed in Germany among many people, who were addicted to worship the images of the saints, that if they would present gifts, and dance before the images of those, on particular occasions, they should live in safety and enjoy good health, for the ballance of the year.

It appears that there were two chapels sacred to saint vitus, the one near ulm, and the other near Ravensberg, both of which were famous, for the annual meetings, of Dancing fanatics. From this superstitious belief, many people repaired to the chapels of saint vitus annually, where they would dance, day and night until they <sup>were</sup> seized with a delirium, and would fall down in a kind of trance. They would then return, home, having undergone as they imagined a complete renovation. But upon the return of the usual time of meeting the next year, they concluded that they could



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Precise and steady, and disordered motion of their limbs, indicating to them, that a new regeneration was necessary; when they would again repair to the same place, for the sake of dancing. This one writer very justly attributes to the force of Imagination and habit. One writer tells us that he had conversed with several persons who were in the habit of resorting to such Dances, and who were warm advocates of its beneficial effects; one person had paid the annual visit for twenty four, and another for thirty years—

Such appears to be the origin of the name, which is given to this disease. It appears, however that it was applied in the first instances, chiefly to cases of Insanity, where there was a great disposition for violent exercise, of any kind, whatever whether of the temporary delirium of the fanatic, or the permanent derangement of the maniac.

There are cases upon record if they are to be credited, one of which a woman danced vehemently day and night, until she wore all the skin off her feet. The other a man seized with a similar Insanity, and who ran about constantly until he suffered the most profuse perspirations, and was unable to cease from his exercise except when he was overpowered by sleep.



It is remarkable that a disease so singular, and formidable in its appearance, and which is so obstinate in its continuance, and one which reduces the patient to such a degree of distress and inconvenience; no very satisfactory description of its symptoms and cure, so far as I am able to learn is to be collected from the ancient writers in medicine. I can see no reason for supposing that the disease is by any means of a modern origin, but on the contrary I believe it must have occasionally been observed from the earliest period.

The ancients have either not described it, or they have done it so indistinctly, and confounded it with so many other nervous diseases, that they are with difficulty to be comprehended. And none of them have by any means attempted to give us a complete and full description of the disease as it appears at this time, and which is so accurately described by the more modern writers. The disease anciently denominated (*Sciatyrbæ*) which signifies those pains in the legs, which sometimes attend scorbutic habits; appears to have resembled





Chorea in several symptoms, so that some writers have considered the terms as synonymous. Sauvage treats of chorea under the appellation of *Scotolyrie*, *Chorea vitæ*. Pliny mentions the *Scotolyrie*, as a disease which occurred, with the scurvy, among the roman soldiers encamped near the Rhine, in consequence as he says of drinking for some time the water of a certain spring. He describes it in a few words; "Compages in gemitibus solvuntur" — which seem to imply a simple paralysis of the legs.

But the definitions of *scotolyrie*, handed to us from the ancients, can scarcely apply to chorea, as it has generally been understood since the time of Sydenham. The illustrious Sydenham was the first writer, as far as I know, who accurately described the whole of the symptoms, which is now and has been since his time, denominated by the name of *Chorea*, or *saint vitæ's dance*; and indeed he has been copied, and followed in his description, by nearly all the writers who have written since his time. Sydenham however we find, speaks of it as a disease which was vulgarly called *Chorea vitæ* in his day. Doctor Darwin speaks of a disease which affects the muscles of the extremities and other parts of the body, and which occurs in a death, that bears a considerable resemblance to chorea. Doctor Darwin supposes the affections to be quite different and therefore <sup>he</sup> has called the disease *Convulsio Doloreifica* (Painfull Convulsions).

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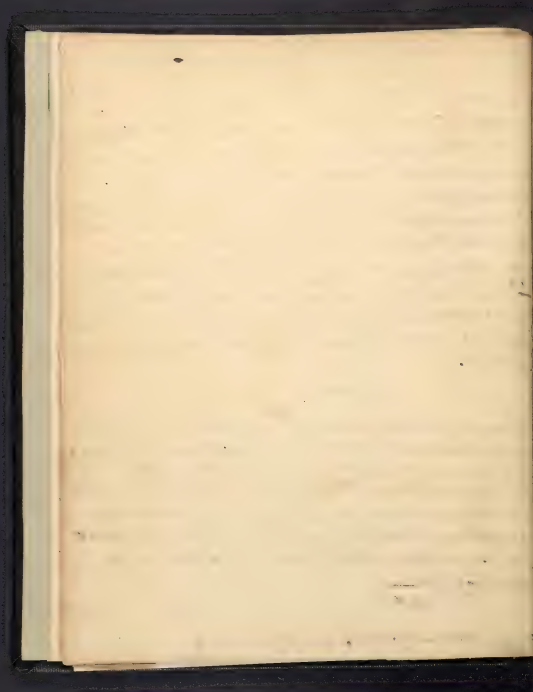
because the motions of the muscles he affirms, <sup>are</sup> made in  
order to relieve some uneasy sensation, particularly he says  
the pains left after Rheumatism, whereas he says the  
motions in Chorea only occur when the patient attempts,  
to exert the natural ones; and are not attended with pain;  
and cease when he lies down; without trying to move. \*  
However difficult these motions may be from true Chorea, for  
I will not attempt to decide either way; yet this statement  
of Doctor Douvins of Chorea appears to me, to be not  
altogether correct, for it appears that the motions in Chorea,  
<sup>are</sup> almost constant, and <sup>some</sup> continuous when the patient is  
lying down, and likewise during sleep in all violent cases,  
and in a number of cases it is attended with a great deal  
of pain.

### Symptoms,

The coming on of this disease is generally slow and is indicated  
by the patients losing his usual vivacity and playfulness,  
by a very variable appetite, and it is of ten greatly  
increased, the patient is afflicted in most instances with  
a swelling, and hardness in the belly, in some however there  
is a soft and lank belly, the patient is generally afflicted  
with a constipated bowels, which is aggravated as the  
disease progresses—

Stiff

\* In *Æconomia* Chap 10, 2, 3, and Chap III—1:1



Slight irregular, involuntary motions are now soon observed, particularly of the muscles of the face, and which is little taken notice of, but which is soon followed, by more violent convulsive motions, that soon begin to call the attention of the friends of the patient.

These convulsive motions vary very considerably, the muscles of the face, of the Jaw of the head and those of the trunk of the body; on upon different occasions affected by it. At this stage of the disease the patient does not walk steadily; but his gait more resembles a person jumping or starting; he sometimes cannot walk a tail, as if he was pained, and he is unable to perform the common necessary motions, with the affected limbs. Indeed when the poor creature wishes to be at rest, the muscles are a perpetually moving; disturbing the limbs, &c, and trunk; and when any motion is attempted by the will, it is performed irregularly, and with the greatest difficulty, after several unsuccessful attempts. If the patient takes a cup of drink in his hand, he performs as Doctor Sydenham has remarked, a thousand & a ludicrous gestures, before he is able to bring it to his mouth; as he is unable to bring it in a straight line, his hand being drawn hither and thither by



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The convulsions; he is compelled to move it about for some time, till at length, it reaches his lips, he flings the liquor suddenly in his mouth, and drinks it greedily, as if the poor creature designed only to excite the laughter of the bystanders—

These convulsive motions are more a lip's vertent, and constant except during sleep, when they are considerably abated, but in some violent cases the sleep even becomes disturbed by the violent motions. Although different muscles are occasionally affected; in general the muscles which were affected in the beginning of the disease remain so during the whole course of the disease. As the disease advances articulation generally becomes considerably affected; deglutition is also performed with difficulty. The eyes lose their brightness; the countenance is pale and languid. And when the disease has existed for a considerable length of time; the mind becomes affected with some degree of fatuity; and thereby interrupts the free <sup>sensory</sup> use of the mental faculties. In the advanced stage of the disease, a considerable wasting of the flesh takes place; in consequence of the constant motions, sleep and appetite, and weak digestion, which are common consequences of long continued chorea.





Chorea affects the male and female sex indiscriminately, and generally those who appear to be of a weakly constitution; or those whose health has been impaired, by a long sedentary life, or improper food. It appears more frequently from the age of eight to that of the fourteenth year of age, but it frequently goes beyond that period. Doctor Cullen informs us that he saw the disease in a robust man of upwards of forty years of age; I my self have seen it in a woman who was married and had children —

Before I proceed to the consideration of the cure of this disease I do not think it will be improper, to make a few observations, as to its most probable nature and cause; for however simple and plain it may appear to some, still unlike in this as well as in most other diseases, are not all agreed as to <sup>its</sup> nature, and the best manner of curing it. We find one <sup>author</sup> contending that it is altogether a paralytic affection, another that it is both a paralytic and convulsive ~~disease~~ affection, and a third that it is altogether a convulsive disease and the method proposed for curing it has been as various as the opinion about its supposed nature.



From all I have heard, seen, and read of this disease I am  
inclined to believe that it is a fever in most cases of the  
~~convulsive~~ <sup>Convulsive</sup> kind; and agreeable to the unity of disease  
as taught us by our learned and ingenious Professor  
of the Institutes and Practice of medicine in the University  
of Pennsylvania, I further believe it is arising principally  
to an irregular and morbid action, or in other words to a con-  
stant invading principally the muscular and nervous  
systems, without materially affecting the arterial system.

And that it is to be cured in the same way, as we  
cure other fevers in general, varying our practice ac-  
cording to the changes which takes place during the  
continuance of the disease.

I mentioned in a former place that Doctor Sydenham was  
the first writer who described accurately the symptoms  
of this disease; and in his description we find he  
mentions that it seemed to him to proceed from a  
humour as he called it rushing in upon the nerves, and  
thereby exciting such preternatural motions; and hence  
says this excellent writer the first indications in the cure  
are to be directed in opening these humours, which is  
to be done <sup>by</sup> bleeding and purging. And after that to  
strengthen the nervous system — — — — —



I see no reason why the muscles and nerves, should not be affected with fever, as well as the arterial system; and I think our Professor has clearly and satisfactorily shown the great similarity between symptoms of fever and the affections of the nervous system.

We find tetanity induced on a part of the arterial system, predisposes to convulsions of the whole arterial system; just so it is with the nervous system, tetanity induced on a part only of the nervous system, predisposes to general convulsions as in tetanus. Convulsions of the blood vessels is always preceded by tetanity in fever; so is convulsions in the nervous system. Are convulsions of the arterial system attended with alternate action and remission? So is convulsions in the nervous system. Are there certain fevers which affect particular parts of the body and not the whole? as hectic which seldom produces delirium or head ache; so there are certain convulsions of the nervous <sup>system</sup> which affect the limbs, without affecting the functions of the brain; such for instance as tetanus and particularly the disease which I am now speaking of. Are there different grades in fever as the yellow fever, the bilious fever, and the common intermittent fever? so there are in the convulsions of the nervous system, as in hydrophobia, Epilepsy, Hysteria &c. Do convulsions of the arterial system go off gradually? so do convulsions from the nervous system, as in tetanus and likewise Chorea which I shall say hereafter

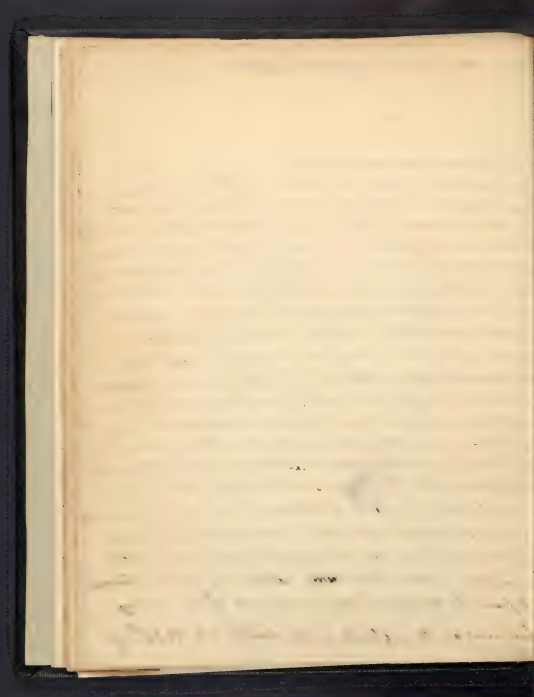


disappears slowly, and many other like affections.

### Cause.

A variety of causes have been ascribed as producing this disease but I do not think it necessary at this time to <sup>enter</sup> into a narration of all the causes which have been mentioned by the different writers.

I believe it may be induced by nearly all the causes which produce fever in general. The disease is often attributed to worms in the alimentary canal; and to the drying up of cutaneous eruptions. Doctor Dancin seems to have thought that its most frequent cause was the repulsion of the Hch. acute fevers, affections of the stomach, the use of Mercury, terror and other strong mental impressions, are mentioned among the causes which occasionally induce Chera. Dilution is likewise supposed by writers to be a frequent cause of the disease when it occurs in children, and that it may be cured in such cases by cutting the gums - Doctor Hamilton who I shall mention again thinks that Chera is generally attended with a morbid action and Constipation of the bowels and consequently with a large accumulation of feces in that canal. This opinion remarkably the case in one patient which came under the notice of Doctor Hamilton, it was a boy who appeared thin and much emaciated, with a large belly and domo, yet he observed that from the time of the commencement of his recovery which was on the fifteenth of the month, till the 25<sup>th</sup> of





the same month, that the quantity of pus which was discharged was nearly astonishing and such as he had never seen before in any case; and it appeared to him that during this small period that it was nearly equal in weight to the whole bulk of the patient.

### Treatment.

I believe there is no disease which affects man about which there has been more controversy, and a greater diversity of opinion, as to the cure, than there has been in cholera. We find each practitioner recommending a peculiar mode of treatment, according to the particular notion which he entertained of the nature and cause of the disease.

Some contending that it ought to be treated by the antihlogistic regimen; others on the contrary contending strongly that all debilitating remedies ought wholly to be avoided, and that tonic remedies ought always to be employed.

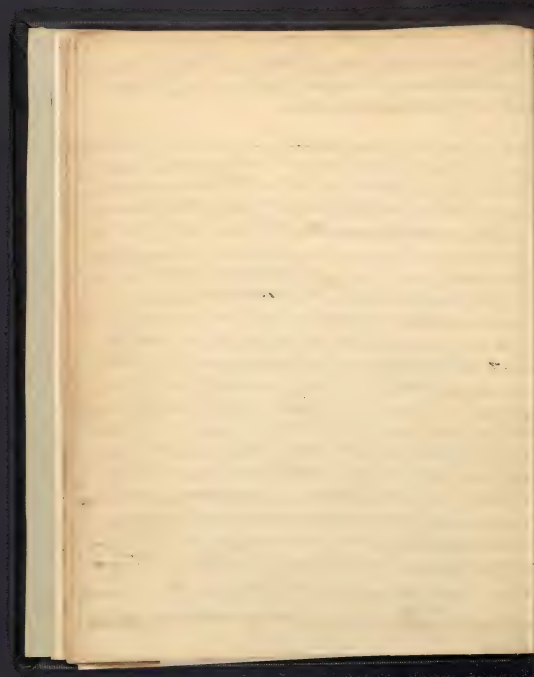
The advocates for the last mode of treatment, seem to have been led into a mistake by some of our modern writers, and particularly the theory of the ingenious but unfortunate Brown, who considered all spasmodic diseases, diseases of debility, and therefore for the <sup>cure</sup> of such, tonic and stimulating medicines ought solely to be depended on; and that the slightest evacuations would be highly detrimental.

I am disposed to believe that most of the disputes, have originated, from Physicians not being sufficiently acquainted with the laws of the animal economy; and from their not paying a sufficient



degree of attention to the state of <sup>the</sup> system, and therefore prescribing more for the name of a disease than according to the particular state of the system.

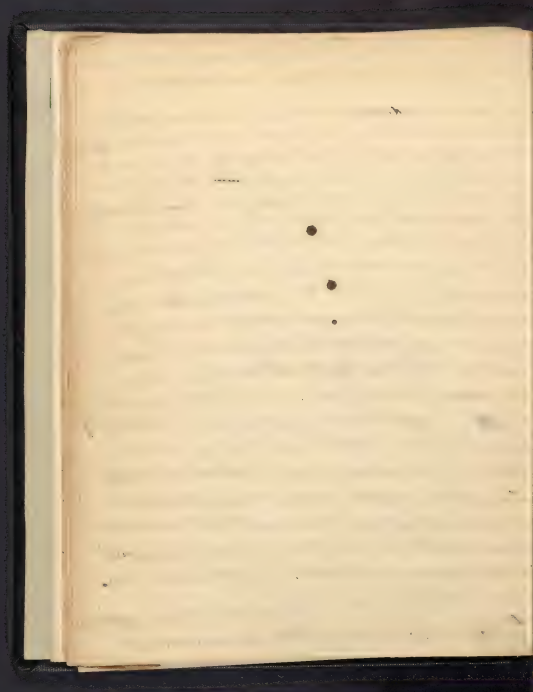
All the remedies which have been recommended in this disease may be classed under two heads. 1<sup>st</sup> Jamsick and evacuants, or such as tend to support and strengthen the constitution, or such as tend on the other hand to evacuate the bowels, and to diminish the quantity of the circulating fluids. I believe they are all improper if they be exhibited indiscriminately, without paying any regard to the state of the system; and I believe they may all be proper if exhibited at proper periods and in their proper places; for I believe there is no such a thing as a specific for any disease and that it is the height of absurdity as well as empiricism to expect to cure any disease by one ~~one~~ remedy or by one continual plan of treatment. It is not a little surprising to find those Physicians who believe that all spasmodic diseases are arising altogether to debility, opposing in such strong terms the employment of any evacuating remedy in the treatment of Chorea; and trusting altogether to tonic and stimulating medicines. And thus we find cures attributed to the use of iuspeleda, Valerian, Musk, Camphire, Belladonna, Opium, Vinchona, Tincture, Salivation, the Cold Bath, Purgations of St<sup>c</sup> and Bark. Under the employment of these remedies I am well assured that the <sup>disease</sup> is often cured; but the symptoms of the disease



have often continued, with great security for a long time; notwithstanding all the same diseases which have been mentioned.

I have rather than ~~less~~ <sup>less</sup> to believe that the disease in the first instances, might always be treated with the happiest effects by evacuating medicines particularly by purges; and after that tonicks may be employed ~~with~~ not only with safety but with the greatest advantage. From the notion which Doctor Sydenham entertained of the disease and the method of treatment he adopted, we find he tells us that he succeeded in curing five cases. The only ones which he had seen of the disease Doctor Hammett who I mentioned in another place, and who saw upwards of twenty, persons afflicted with this disease a number which does not fall <sup>the</sup> ~~total~~ <sup>to</sup> of every Practitioner to see, tells us that he seldom failed of curing his patients in a short time, after he adopted the evacuating plan of treatment, which he was led to adopt, from the theory which he entertained of the disease. From the notions which the Doctor entertained of the disease he concluded that the most important part of the cure, must be, to remove the Constipated state of the bowels, and in order to accomplish, that he trusted nearly altogether to purgative medicines.

At first he tells <sup>us</sup> that he acted with the greatest caution and diffidence in <sup>the</sup> employment of a remedy, which was so much at









observable. A gentle purge should be given occasionally, in order to keep up their healthy action; and thereby prevent the accumulation of feces, and consequently a relaps.

At this period or as soon as the Intestines be sufficiently evacuated, I would think that medicines possessed of a tonic and a stimulating power, such as the various preparations of St. Bark, the cold bath, Exercise, a salivation &c might be used with the greatest advantage; In removing the irritability of the system; and by giving tone to the stomach and bowels, and aiding the purgative medicines in evacuating costiveness, and thereby complete the cure which was already so far advanced. Dr. Hammett observes that by a proper attention to light and nourishing food, together with exercise in the open air, his patients generally, quickly renewed their health and strength.

With this nothing  
Gentlemen I conclude this short and Impromptu essay. I have aimed at elaborate a new, but have endeavored to lay before you, in as concise a manner as I possibly could, such observations, concerning this disease, which I thought most useful. I hope there will be no apology necessary when it is recited, that I had an essay already



prepared on another subject, but was so unfortunate as to have it objected to, on the ground that it was not immediately enough connected with medicine, and therefore I was under the necessity of taking up a subject, that I had thought but little about.

It becomes me before I take my leave altogether, to take this opportunity of expressing my gratitude, and obligation to each of the medical professors, for the much useful information I have derived, during my attendance on their Lectures, as delivered in the University of Pennsylvania.

Finis

